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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000425

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EUR/NCE FOR ERIC FICHTE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CVIS](#) [EUN](#) [EZ](#)
SUBJECT: CODEL DAVIS IN CZECH REPUBLIC: TRANSATLANTIC
RELATIONS, VISA WAIVER, AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Dodman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. On April 21, 2006, a delegation of eight members of the U.S. House of Representatives met with Czech Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek and President Vaclav Klaus. Both leaders stressed the importance of strong U.S.-Czech relations; Representatives expressed strong appreciation for these ties and the Czechs' efforts in the war on terror. The Prime Minister described his commitment to NATO and ongoing Czech military presence in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo. On Kosovo and Iran he urged a cautious approach. The Prime Minister called the visa waiver dispute the most sensitive issue in U.S.-Czech relations, but conceded that imposing a reciprocal visa policy would be counter-productive; Representatives promised to raise the question on their return to Washington. End summary.

¶2. (U) On April 21, 2006, a delegation of eight members of the U.S. House of Representatives, led by Rep. Jo Ann Davis (R-VA), met with Czech Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek and President Vaclav Klaus. Prague followed the Codel's meetings in Vienna for the biannual session of the US-EU Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue. The other members of the delegation were Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY), Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-NY), Rep. Phil English (R-PA), Rep. Silvestre Reyes (D-TX), Rep. Al Wynn (D-MD), Rep. Susan Davis (D-CA), and Rep. Solomon Ortiz (D-TX).

Meeting with PM Paroubek

¶3. (C) Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek said the Czech Republic is a staunch ally of the U.S. and remains committed to a strong Transatlantic partnership. He also discussed Czech military commitments, Kosovo, the visa waiver, and Iran. Rep. Davis thanked the Prime Minister for Czech friendship and support for U.S. objectives.

¶4. (C) Paroubek said the Czech Republic remains committed to the military missions underway in Afghanistan, Iraq, and notably Kosovo, where the Czech contingent is currently the largest of any EU member. The Prime Minister pledged that Czech foreign policy would not change, and would not retreat from current commitments or NATO responsibilities, if he remains in office after the June 2-3 elections.

¶5. (C) The Prime Minister expressed concern about the Balkans in general, and the question of Kosovo independence in particular. Drawing a distinction between Czech government policy and his personal views, he advocated a slow movement forward on Kosovo, taking into account the complex political situation, property and religious rights of the minority Serb

population. He repeated his previously stated personal views that Kosovo may need to be divided in order to protect the interests of Kosovar Serbs. (Note: Paroubek was careful to indicate that his personal views on Kosovo did not reflect government policy. As reported septel, discussion with the MFA on April 24 confirmed that Czech government views on Kosovo are very close to those of the USG.)

¶6. (C) In response to a question from the Codel on the Iranian nuclear program, the Prime Minister urged the U.S. to continue negotiating until Iran is convinced to behave in a responsible and reasonable manner. He shared with the Codel the conversation he had during a recent visit to Egypt in which President Mubarak said that Iran could be expected to use its influence on militant groups to unleash a wave of conflict around the world if attacked.

¶7. (C) The Prime Minister described visas as the most sensitive political issue affecting U.S.-Czech relations. The Czech public finds the current situation difficult to accept given the extremely close relationship between the two nations. However, Paroubek ruled out any reciprocal measures against U.S. visitors to the Czech Republic, as these would harm the CR's own interests. In response, Rep. Davis and other members of the Codel said they intended to raise the question of Czech membership in the visa waiver program (VWP) when they returned to Washington. They expressed a desire to investigate possible changes in U.S. legislation so that the VWP did not take a "one size fits all" approach, i.e., a possible shift in legislation such that criteria for membership in the VWP would be different for allies like the Czech Republic. In comments to the press reiterating a desire to discuss the issue in Washington, Rep. Davis was careful to stress that this was not a promise that

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legislation would change, which required the votes of a majority of the Congress.

Meeting with President Klaus

¶8. (C) The thirty-minute meeting with President Vaclav Klaus focused on Czech-EU relations, energy security, Hamas, and Iran.

¶9. (C) The President said the Czech Republic's primary challenge today is determining how to "survive being in the EU." He chided the USG for its lack of criticism of the EU, claiming that it stemmed from a failure to properly understand the EU. Klaus, a well-known Euroskeptic, was critical of the EU's lack of economic dynamism and the "democratic deficit" of EU institutions. He said EU accession had entailed a relative loss of freedom and sovereignty for the Czechs.

¶10. (C) On European energy security, the President acknowledged that Russia could have a negative impact. However, he was more concerned the EU would use energy security concerns to assert more centralized control and regulation of member state activities. The President believed the potential problems posed by reliance on Russian energy resources were not sufficiently worrisome to justify the "threat" of greater EU infringement on member state sovereignty.

¶11. (C) Turning to the Middle East, the President said the Czechs enjoy close relations with Israel, and he hoped that pragmatism would compel Hamas to adopt more "rational" and "respectable" policies over time. (Note: the GOCR strongly support the USG position that Hamas must renounce violence, recognize Israel, and honor all previous agreements). On Iran's nuclear ambitions, President Klaus echoed the Prime Minister in urging the U.S. to continue negotiating with Iran.
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